

Lansdale Names RFK in Castro Plot

By Jeremiah O'Leary
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Retired Maj. Gen. Edward G. Lansdale has named Robert F. Kennedy as the administration official who ordered him in 1962 to launch a CIA project to work out all feasible plans for "getting rid of" Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro.

Lansdale, in an interview with The Washington Star, never used the word "assassination" and said it was not used by Kennedy, then the attorney general.

But he said there could be no doubt that "the project for disposing of Castro envisioned the whole spectrum of plans from overthrowing the Cuban leader to assassinating him."

Lansdale said he received his instruction from the brother of the late President John F. Kennedy and in turn relayed orders directly to CIA official William K. Harvey, bypassing the agency's chain of command.

A former high-ranking CIA official, who insisted on anonymity, also said that President Kennedy's brother and most trusted adviser precipitated the 1962 CIA project for planning the destruction of Castro and his regime.

This official said Robert Kennedy contacted Lansdale, then assigned to the Pentagon as special assistant to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, because the Kennedys had lost faith in the CIA leadership after the 1961 Bay of Pigs fiasco.

BOTH LANSDALE and the ex-CIA source said the request was relayed without the knowledge of either CIA Director John A. McCone or Secretary McNamara. But Lansdale said both became aware of the planning later, along with members of the so-called "40 Committee" at the White House.

Lansdale will be questioned next week by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence behind closed doors on his role in the 1962 anti-Castro

operation which was known as Operation Mongoose.

Harvey has already appeared before the committee headed by Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho.

The Church Committee already has received testimony from Mafia figure John Roselli that he dealt with CIA representatives, including Harvey, in five attempts to kill Castro from 1960 through 1963. Church has indicated that CIA involvement in plans for assassination of Castro was

terminated soon after President Kennedy died at the hands of an assassin in November 1963.

LANSDALE SAID he was contacted by Robert Kennedy in midsummer of 1962 when there was growing concern about the increasing presence of Soviet military advisers in Cuba and strong suspicion that there might soon be a Soviet ICBM missile force on the island.

The CIA, he said, did not confirm the presence on Cuba of Russian missile sites until October 1962, when President Kennedy acted to blockade the island in the missile crisis.

Lansdale said he instructed Harvey to develop contingency plans for disposing of Castro because he wanted to know if the United States had any such capabilities. He said every means for removing the Castro threat was explored.

"I was thinking in terms of Cuban exiles," Lansdale said. "There were plenty of them talking about Castro and their hatred for him. But I never heard anything about any involvement of the Mafia with the CIA until recently."

ASKED IF he was kept apprised of the extent of Harvey's activities in carrying out the instructions received from Robert Kennedy, Lansdale said he never knew any of the details. "It would have been highly unusual for me to

know any details," he said. "I was relaying instructions to him from the highest authority in the land. I was often in conversation with President Kennedy and his brother."

But Lansdale stipulated that his instructions for the Castro project came directly from Robert Kennedy, not President Kennedy.

Lansdale said he is certain Robert Kennedy's instructions to him did not include the word "assassination." He said the attorney general, as best he could recall, spoke in more general terms of exploring all feasible means and practicalities of doing something "to get rid of" Castro. He said he went around McCone directly to Harvey because the Kennedys were soured on the CIA leadership and because the whole thing was very closely held.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS has previously reported that a special Cabinet-level group was formed in August 1962 to direct anti-Cuban operations under the leadership of Robert Kennedy and with the code name Operation Mongoose. The Rockefeller Commission reportedly obtained the minutes of a meeting Aug. 10, 1962, of this group, listing as present McCone, McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy, presidential assistant for national security. Robert Kennedy's name reportedly was not listed as present.

A memo allegedly written by Lansdale after that meeting also is said to be in the hands of the Rockefeller commission and presumably was turned over to Ford and the Church committee.

That memo allegedly provided the CIA with authority to develop contingency plans for the assassination of Castro. Lansdale, who has said he does not remember the memo, will be asked about it and other details when he is questioned next week by the Church committee.

ALTHOUGH LANSDALE insists he does not know what kind of plans Harvey developed for disposing of Castro, Roselli reportedly testified that he was told to tell Harvey of his plans for killing Castro after the Bay of Pigs invasion failed in 1961. Roselli, according to news accounts, was first recruited for attempts on Castro's life in 1960.

Roselli reportedly testified that he was contacted in Los Angeles by former FBI agent Robert Maheu, then an aide to billionaire Howard Hughes. According to Roselli, the CIA contact officer for the attempts on Castro's life was "Big Jim" O'Connell. After meeting with O'Connell in New York, Roselli reportedly flew to Miami late in 1960 and recruited a Cuban assassination squad who were then equipped with poison pellets.

Maheu was cut out of the operation in 1961, according to Roselli, and thereafter Roselli reported to Harvey. Anderson's report, undisputed by Church, is that there were four more assassination attempts against Castro involving Roselli and Harvey. After an attempt to shoot Castro from a Havana rooftop failed in March 1963, Roselli reportedly was told the project was abandoned.